Essay Writing:

Puritan America: Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter

*Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!*

–Nathaniel Hawthorne

*If you bring forth what is inside you*

*What you bring forth will save you*

*If you do not bring forth what is inside you*

*What is inside you will destroy you.*

-Saint Thomas, Gnostic Gospels (From Julia Alvarez’s *10 Commandments of Writing*)

Now that we have read and watched fictional portrayals of Puritans in America, it is time to consider how much we are unlike or like our colonial contemporaries. Naming and shaming in the seventeenth century was public and brutal. Consider whether we are the same judgmental people underneath as you formulate thoughts for your essay.

* Do we still assign letters to people’s chests, albeit silently or quietly?
* Do we walk around feeling like we have been “lettered” or judged, fairly or unfairly?
* Do we hide our shame or sin, like Dimmesdale, only to have it torture or expose us later?
* Do we metaphorically hang people for “sinning”?

Assignment:

Write a 750-800 word reflective essay delineating your letters: what do you wear on the outside of your clothing that people see (like Hester), and what letter is hidden underneath your clothing that no one sees (like Dimmy)?

* Are they the same?
* Have others given you the “outside” letter or have you presented a certain “self” to your community that has cause the letter to be there?
* Do you inadvertently assign letters?

\*The questions are meant for thought and consideration – you do not need to answer them all in your essay. You should write an introductory paragraph with a thesis 2-3 body paragraphs that illustrate your ideas (give examples) and a thoughtful, forward thinking concluding paragraph (that does not restate your thesis).